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Three years of training programs (1966-69) for new department chairmen at the University of Utah are described. Differing formats (with their relative advantages and disadvantages) for acquainting new chairmen with the scope of their jobs, their activities, and some appropriate administrative techniques are outlined. Such problems as peer leadership, recruiting, and budgets and finance receive attention. The advisability of including experienced chairmen, vice-presidents in charge of various areas, and the university president in the meetings is weighed. (AF)

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NEW CHAIRMEN AT THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

by Charles H. Monson, Jr.*

Before I describe our Training Program for Chairmen at the University of Utah, let me tell you a little bit about my background. Perhaps then you'll understand what I've been trying to do for department chairmen the past three years. I became chairman of the Philosophy Department in 1964. I came to that position after 12 years of teaching and publishing. I enjoyed the teaching a great deal. I took the chairmanship with some reluctance because I thought of it as a "housekeeping job," but I had large numbers of students and I saw the chairmanship as a chance to cut down on the vast amount of teaching I was doing, and perhaps even to take a chance at something else.

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I'll never forget the first experience I had of looking at the financial report which told me whether the department was solvent or not. It was frightening! I prepared my first budget, and I had little notion of what I ought to be asking for the department. I did think that I wanted us to have a more substantial graduate program, but I did not know how to translate that idea into the budget procedures. We had recruiting to do. I had participated in recruiting in the department before, but I had never organized the recruiting effort. And when the requests came for retention, promotions, and tenure recommendations, I quickly learned that I did not know how to organize or conduct a meeting very efficiently. All year long I had students coming in to talk to me about majoring in the department, university requirements, and procedures, etc., and I discovered that very often I didn't have the answers--even to things that happened within my own department.

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*A speech delivered at the WICHE Department Chairmen Program in Denver on 18 December 1968.

I worked very hard at the job for two years. I gradually learned a few things. But when I looked at the amount of effort I put into the job in comparison to the changes I had made in the department, and compared that to the satisfactions I received from my own teaching and publication, I was hard put to say to myself that I ought to stay in the position any longer.

But I must have had some impact on someone, for in 1965 the chief administrative officers nominated me for one of the American Council of Education's Administrative Internships, and I was away from my campus for the 1965-1966 academic year. I went to Cornell where I looked at administration on that campus, and one of the jobs I did there was to look at the question as to how department chairmen are trained. I looked at the literature, and found it minimal. I did my own survey of that university's procedures and I concluded that most new chairmen duplicated my own experience. They were chosen and then put into the position where they were left to sink or swim. Most felt overwhelmed by their own inadequacies, although the peer recognition of the success of any university depends on its departmental chairmen, and to put into the position of department chairman a man who has had no training for the position and who frequently has little interest and is of unknown competence seemed to me to be putting the future of a great university into very precarious hands.

When my internship was finished I went back to the University of Utah as Associate Vice-President for Academic Affairs, and I was determined that I was going to try to do something to help chairmen to do their job in a better way. To me, that was to be one of the most important administrative functions I could do. That is, I chose that as one of my major jobs. So I met with some of the department chairmen. Together we devised a program that we might use to help give new department chairmen some knowledge of the dimensions of the job, the activities in which a department chairman is involved, and some knowledge of techniques for doing the job.

We decided to offer the program during the fall quarter when chairmen were not yet burdened with the details of their jobs, but at a time when they had had enough experience so they knew what sorts of questions were important to ask. We also decided to call the program "Administrative Leadership Conference," and to hold it on six successive Thursday afternoons for a two-hour period each time. Every chairman in the university was invited to attend, although we chose a time when all of the eight new chairmen in our university said they would be able to attend. During that first year we considered the following six topics: (1) the budget: how to obtain and save money; (2) recruiting and retention: finding and keeping good men; (3) the department and its publics: student affairs, public relations, research; (4) the hard problems: internal dissension, professional malaise, etc.; (5) some dynamics of leadership; (6) what does a good department chairman look like?

We invited administrative officers, experienced departmental chairmen, and faculty members with special competencies in each area to make a short presentation to the group and then to entertain questions and comments for the remainder of the time. Attendance at these meetings ranged from 20 to 35 and the discussions always were quite lively and informative, for both chairmen and guests. We received a number of comments from those who had attended the meetings indicating they had benefited from the experience.

We tried the same format for this program during the 1967-1968 academic year,

changing only the conception of the third topic so that it centered exclusively on student affairs. We also learned that the secretaries and administrative assistants wanted to know more about our budgeting financial procedures so they, too, were invited to the first session. Attendance ranged from fifteen to over a hundred, although we had only six new chairmen that year.

During the academic year 1968-1969, we adopted a somewhat different method for conducting the program. The business officers in our university took over the training of secretaries and administrative assistants, and we went back to working exclusively with new department chairmen. We decided to hold our first meeting at a hotel off campus before school started, and for an entire day. To that meeting we invited three experienced department chairmen and three administrative officers to meet with the ten new chairmen to talk about the position of department chairman itself. We had no formal speeches or agenda; the questions from the new chairmen and comments from the experienced chairmen provided the topics for discussion. We had lunch together and then dismissed the experienced chairmen while the new ones met with other administrators. This was a serious mistake. We should have kept the experienced chairmen, for their comments would have added the reality--and frustrations--chairmen frequently have in their dealings with administrators. The new chairmen didn't know the pertinent questions to ask a Vice-President for Business Affairs, or how to ask them. However, the final action in that meeting was that the group elected a committee to meet with me to work out a program for the remainder of the year.

That committee then proposed three extended luncheon meetings running from noon to 3:00 p.m. during the autumn quarter. They also recommended that these sessions be concerned with: (1) peer leadership; (2) recruiting; and (3) budgets and financial statements. We invited experienced department chairmen to be at each of these meetings, as well as the appropriate academic resource people, and again the format was that of the guests speaking to the questions which came from the group.

For the session on peer leadership we invited a man interested and experienced in T-group interactions, and also two thoughtful, effective and quite different experienced chairmen. All of them talked about how you work effectively with people who are your peers. It was an interesting and provocative discussion. We talked about different styles, their attendant problems, and so forth.

For the second meeting, we invited the President of the University--and, incidentally, the President has been at one or more of the meetings during the two previous years. I wanted the chairmen to see the President. I wanted him to see them, and to make some comments to them. I asked him to talk on recruiting, and he did talk on recruiting for a few minutes. Then he started talking about the role of the department chairman in the university. He gave about a twenty minute speech, and there was a lot of give-and-take afterward. After the President left, we discussed recruiting. So, that was a session which really had a dual focus, but it didn't turn out as well as it should have. We know now that we should have had the President at our first meeting off campus where he could have talked about the role of the chairman, and that this session should have been given over exclusively to talking about styles and techniques for effective recruiting. So, we learned another valuable lesson--to keep the focus on a single topic for an extended period of time.

The third session was scheduled to consider budgets and financial affairs and

our university business people were there. But, the chairmen wanted to talk about personnel problems and to get the advice of the experienced chairmen on how to do certain things. So, our business officers had a free lunch and some instruction in the intricacies of being a department chairman, and we all hoped that the secretaries learned their lessons well in their own budget sessions.

Without exception, these sessions were lively and informative, and the $100 invested in lunches was well spent.

We will meet with the group again in May, 1969, when we will take them off campus, feed them, and spend the time talking about their experiences during the year. We want to learn what their perceptions of the university have come to be, what they think about our procedures and policies, and what changes we ought to be instituting. And we'll discuss what ought to be done during the program next year. This is one of our ways of getting feedback from this year's group to see what we're doing right, if anything, and wrong.

We feel the format used in the 1968-1969 program has worked much better than that used in the previous two years. It has come to grips with real problems that chairmen who are just beginning to be experienced are encountering; it has enabled them to become acquainted with the chief administrative officers of the university, and each other; and, in general, has helped the new chairmen to feel more comfortable in their positions.

After three years' experience with this type of program, we are convinced it has a number of important advantages. First, it has provided new chairmen with knowledge of the problems a chairman is likely to encounter, and some of the skills for dealing with them. Second, there has been exchange between chairmen and administrators, with the mutual benefits which come to each. Third, it has enabled the new chairmen to feel a sense of rapport with each other, and with the experienced chairmen. Fourth, it has mitigated the anxieties a new chairman experiences when he enters his position and so has lessened the antipathy towards administrative positions shared by most faculty members. Fifth, it has provided a new chairman knowledge of where to go to obtain help, and has provided first name acquaintanceships to make those requests easier to ask. Finally, it has brought into the open the question of how one can be an effective academic administrator.

We do not know whether the quality of administration at our university has been materially improved by this program; certainly those participating in it have said that the experience has been useful. But, of course, these matters are so difficult to discern that we make no claims. All we assert is the modest but charitable claim that our new chairmen at least are not worse than they would have been without the program.

We do believe that the format for the third year's program is much better than that used for the two preceding years. Our critique, nevertheless, showed some specific ways in which the program can be improved, which we will do next year.

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